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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7969
INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 2146
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0067
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 4112
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 1253
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2023
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 6968
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 8060
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5370
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0628
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2879
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9869
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 3261
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 5305
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 0910
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 1850
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 3642
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0134
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2076
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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S E C R E T ISLAMABAD 001362

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SUBJECT: CHIEF JUSTICE SUSPENSION PROTESTS SET ON "SIMMER"
- PPP HEAVYWEIGHTS QUIETLY SEEK DIALOGUE

REF: ISLAMABAD 1329 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) The Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy called for further demonstrations on March 26 to protest Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry's suspension. Turnout was highest in Lahore (septel), where approximately 1,200 Pakistan People's Party, Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz, and Jamaat-e-Islami representatives protested peacefully. (Note: The Muthahida Majlis-e-Amam coalition of religious parties, of which Jamaat-e-Islami is a member, declared its support for the Alliance's call for protests. End Note.) Islamabad turnout was low: approximately 50 protesters staged a three-hour sit-in at Melody Market. Numbers in Karachi and Peshawar were similarly low.

12. (C) As the Alliance's senior coalition partner, the Pakistan People's Party is participating in the protests, but their hearts do not appear to be in it, keeping the numbers of protesters relatively low. Part of the reason may be the arrest of many party workers. The media reported that Punjab police arrested over 200 opposition leaders and workers over the weekend. Others, one Pakistan People's Party official said, are "in hiding" so as not to be arrested.

13. (S-NF) More fundamentally, People's Party leadership is still taking a wait-and-see approach to the Chief Justice controversy. Pakistan People's Party ex-Senator Abdullah Riar brought together National Security Advisor Tariq Aziz and Justice Chaudhry's lead counsel (and People's Party member) Aitzaz Ahsan for an exploratory meeting over the weekend. The result of the meeting, Riar said, was a basic exchange of positions. On March 26, Riar told PolOff that Aitzaz's position was a non-starter, since he was asking the

government to withdraw the reference against Justice Chaudhry. The parties left the meeting willing to talk again, however.

14. (S-NF) Comment: The Pakistan People's Party has two reasons to distance itself from the Chief Justice controversy. The publicly discussed reason is that they do not want to hand a victory to the religious parties. More privately, however, they may see the controversy as a way to advance their political agenda. Through its quiet diplomacy and restraining its street power, the Pakistan People's Party may be positioning itself for a potential electoral deal with the Musharraf government. End Comment.

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